

**Staring down the lion: uncertainty avoidance
and operational risk culture in a tourism
organisation**

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PREFACE

This mini-dissertation is the final deliverable in the Centre for Applied Risk Management (UARM)'s taught master's degree programme. The mini-dissertation was written in article format and consists of three sections: Research project overview, Article and Reflection.

This mini-dissertation is the student's work. The student was responsible for the final concept, set up, execution of the research project and writing of the mini-dissertation. The members of the supervisory team contributed in an advisory and technical support capacity on study conception and design, analysis and interpretation of data and critical revision of the manuscript. The mini-dissertation was language edited before submission.

The main study supervisor gave the student permission to submit this mini-dissertation for examination.

ABSTRACT

This study interrogated operational risk-based decision-making in the face of uncertainty in a large African safari tourism organisation, by exploring individual and perceived team member approaches to operational uncertainty. The academic literature is not clear on how uncertainty influences the inclusion of operational risk in decision-making. Social psychologist Geert Hofstede's cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance served as an entry point to design the research questions. A vignette-based qualitative data collection method was applied using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. These snapshot vignettes consisted of four scenarios pertaining to organisation-specific operational risks. Convenience sampling was used to identify 15 senior managers in a geographically dispersed safari organisation. Participants were identified in three domains of work: safari camp; regional office and head office. They were asked to describe their own reactions and decisions, as well as how they thought other managers would react to uncertainties in specific operational contexts. The data were qualitatively analysed for different participants in different roles and positions in the organisation. The findings indicated that approaches to uncertainty in the selected multi-national safari organisation were influenced by factors including situational context, the availability and communication of information, level of relevant operational experience, and participants' role in the organisation. These factors are likely to influence decision-making in the context of operational risk under conditions of uncertainty, especially in geographically dispersed organisations. A preliminary model reveals that decision-making in the face of uncertainty may in practice be more complex than existing theoretical studies propose, specifically in relation to individual perceptions of uncertainty in organisational decision-making.

Key words: uncertainty; operational risk; geographically dispersed organisations; role-related decision-making; safari tourism

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RESEARCH PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1 This study in relation to the field of risk management

Hospitality and tourism businesses, especially safari tourism organisations, often start up as small private companies that are driven largely by relationships and, at times, maverick attitudes to gain success. An example would include the founders of one of the largest and most successful safari operators in Africa. In 1983, they took a Landrover from South Africa, loaded with supplies, and trekked deep into the Okavango Delta in Botswana, not a well-known tourism destination at the time, to establish camps and guide tourists in pristine wilderness areas. To create a business, they took considerable risk both at a personal and business level, to bring tourists into an unfamiliar wildlife area in another country. Many of the other successful safari operators have similar beginnings. This study is relevant to the heart of the environment in which safari organisations operate, namely remote areas in multiple countries. As globalisation progresses, academics and business practitioners are becoming more interested in the work of geographically dispersed teams and the technologies that they use to co-ordinate and communicate their work (O'Leary & Cummings, 2007). Performance challenges in this dispersed work environment are likely to influence the effective integration of risk management practices across such an organisation. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO, 2009a) refers to risk management as “the architecture of risk principles, risk management frameworks and risk processes to achieve organisational objectives”. If any portion of this ‘architecture’ is left out or only partially understood in areas of geographically dispersed operations, it could negatively influence decision-making around risk and the overall integration of risk management.

1.2 The selected topic

Uncertainty is a key element of risk. In the context of risk management; “uncertainty exists whenever the knowledge or understanding of an event, consequence or likelihood is inadequate or incomplete” (ISO, 2009b). A significant driver of risk-based decision-making is how organisations and the individuals who work in them approach uncertainty. There have been and are a number of uncertainty related constructs in literature, from uncertainty tolerance, uncertainty acceptance and uncertainty avoidance, with applications largely focused on marketing choices and organisational decision-making as described in the present research article. Dabić, Tipurić, and Podrug (2015) proposed that complex decisions are the consequence of social and cultural values instilled in every individual. In his construct of uncertainty avoidance, Hofstede (2009) points out that cultures are influenced by levels of stress in the face of an unknown future. Although risk culture is not a key focus of this study, it is a valuable by-product of integrated risk-decision-making in an organisation. The unknown is a concept I believe to be highly relevant to organisations that work in remote geographically dispersed organisations.

My registered study title focused on uncertainty avoidance in relation to operational risk culture. However, as my research progressed, it became more evident that strict adherence to the concept of uncertainty avoidance and risk culture would limit my study and that a more holistic approach to uncertainty was required instead. This led to my focus on uncertainty and operational risk decision-making in an African safari tourism organisation in my article.

1.3 Intended audiences

The target audiences for this article are academics, risk managers, executive personnel and senior managers in geographically dispersed safari tourism organisations.

1.4 Selected journal

The selected journal for this article is the *Journal for Behavioural Decision Making*. It was selected on the grounds that it is a peer-reviewed journal (impact factor: 1.738), which focuses on psychological approaches specific to behavioural decision-making in real-life contexts. Papers published in the journal encompass topics including individual decision-making, organisational decision-making, decision aiding and the role of judgment and behavioural factors. A number of articles that apply the vignette method on which I based my method were published there. The suitability of the article for the journal will be re-evaluated after examination and the work is expected to be revised before submission to a suitable journal following examination feedback. The author guidelines can be accessed at the following link:

[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/\(ISSN\)1099-0771/homepage/ForAuthors.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1099-0771/homepage/ForAuthors.html). The maximum article length required for acceptance to this journal is 10 000 words. My article is 9304 words long.

1.5 References in this section

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ARTICLE

Staring down the lion: uncertainty and operational risk decision-making in an African safari tourism organisation

1 Abstract

This study interrogated operational risk-based decision-making in the face of uncertainty in a large African safari tourism organisation, by exploring individual and perceived team member approaches to operational uncertainty. The academic literature is not clear on how uncertainty influences the inclusion of operational risk in decision-making. Social psychologist Geert Hofstede's cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance served as an entry point to design the research questions. A vignette-based qualitative data collection method was applied using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. These snapshot vignettes consisted of four scenarios pertaining to organisation-specific operational risks. Convenience sampling was used to identify 15 senior managers in a geographically dispersed safari organisation. Participants were identified in three domains of work: safari camp; regional office and head office. They were asked to describe their own reactions and decisions, as well as how they thought other managers would react to uncertainties in specific operational contexts. The data were qualitatively analysed for different participants in different roles and positions in the organisation. The findings indicated that approaches to uncertainty in the selected multi-national safari organisation were influenced by factors including situational context, the availability and communication of information, level of relevant operational experience, and participants' role in the organisation. These factors are likely to influence decision-making in the context of operational risk under conditions of uncertainty, especially in geographically dispersed organisations. A preliminary model reveals that decision-making in the face of uncertainty may in practice be more complex than existing theoretical studies propose, specifically in relation to individual perceptions of uncertainty in organisational decision-making.

Key words: uncertainty; operational risk; geographically dispersed organisations; role-related decision-making; safari tourism

2 Introduction

Risk has been fundamentally linked to uncertainty in the academic literature, and therefore decisions made in relation to uncertainty are integrally associated with risk management activities (Aven, 2012; ISO, 2009b). In the context of risk management, uncertainty exists whenever the knowledge or understanding of an event's consequence or likelihood is inadequate or incomplete (ISO, 2009b). Uncertainty has always been a fact of life and human societies have had to, and continue to have to develop ways to alleviate anxiety caused by ambiguity (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Tykocinski, Amir, and Ayal (2017) argue that in many decision-making situations uncertainty can be harnessed to achieve strategic goals. Research suggests that effective risk decision-making is further challenged in organisations that are multi-contextual in nature, as, for example, in companies that are geographically dispersed, or where roles are spread across departments (Knoben & Oerlemans, 2006; O'Leary & Cummings, 2007).

To explore role-related decision-making under uncertainty, specifically in terms of operational risks, this study focused on senior management groups in a geographically dispersed safari tourism organisation in Africa. These senior managers were identified in three domains of work: a safari camp, a regional office, and head office. These three domains were located within three sub-Saharan countries in which the organisation operates. This study investigated how participants believed they would respond to the operational risks, as well as their perceptions of how their colleagues would react to the same uncertainties across the three work domains. How people approach and respond to uncertain situations serve as representations of the integration of risk in decision-making, which by association is likely to influence the risk culture of an organisation (Dabić et al., 2015; IRM, 2012). Vignettes were used to provide interview data to identify factors that influence decisions under conditions of uncertainty. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What key uncertainty-related factors influenced operational-risk-related decisions across different work domains?
- How did senior managers perceive their own responses to operational risk?
- How did senior managers think that other senior managers in the organisation would react to the same situations?
- Did the senior managers share a mutual awareness of their colleagues' perceptions towards operational risks?

The entity studied here is a corporate safari tourism organisation, which operates across several countries in Africa. Safari tourism characteristically involves unpredictable and uncertain situations specific to the isolated wilderness environments in which these organisations operate. A common phrase used in the safari industry, 'whatever you do, don't run', is applied as a recipe

for survival when guiding in the wilderness (Allison, 2007; Hood, Emmett, Roche, & Hendry, 2006). In nature, when potential prey (for instance, a buffalo) does not run, but instead turns to face a predator (a lion in this scenario), the predator becomes uncertain as to where the power lies and will likely back off from the hunt. Standing your ground when charged by a predator provides a far greater chance of survival than running away. The phrase 'staring down the lion' may have literal relevance to the safari industry, but could also be applied as a metaphor to other organisational scenarios, in which the 'lion' represents an intimidating executive or an ethical decision dilemma.

3 Background

3.1 A snapshot of safari tourism organisations

There are many academic studies related to tourist perceptions, tourist approaches to uncertainty, tourist destination risk, and what affects the behaviour of tourists on holiday (Crotts & Pizam, 2003; Litvin, Crotts, & Hefner, 2004; Master & Prideaux, 2000; Money & Crotts, 2003; Yavas, 1990). In the tourism industry, there is often a dichotomy between travellers seeking adventure and tourism operators who wish to offer the experiences safely. While a sense of the unknown may appeal to the tourist, the reality of high public liability insurance premiums and consumer litigiousness have resulted in tourism products becoming heavily regulated to ensure the quality of the product and the safety of guests. Anything less could risk the very future of the organisation (Dickson & Dolnicar, 2004). According to the WTTC (2017), the travel and tourism industry generates \$7.6 trillion per annum (10.2% of global GDP). South Africa's travel and tourism sector is ranked 35th internationally with a total GDP contribution of \$27.3 billion, which is forecast to rise in the future. Statistically the industry is geared for further success, but this does not come without corresponding regulatory and litigation challenges. Tourism as a broader industry is arguably fickle and reliant on positive word-of-mouth and online reviews. The entire organisation is affected if guest experiences are consistently poor or perceived to be unsafe (Lewis & Chambers, 1989; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011).

Many large safari tourism organisations in Africa operate across regions or borders, with the aim of providing guests with 'the ultimate' wilderness safari experience. Operators seek out locations that would be most desirable for travellers, such as the Okavango Delta in Botswana or the Serengeti in Tanzania. The actual camp or lodge locations tend to have limited phone connectivity and are therefore not ideally suited to running a business, which is why these organisations are likely to have a management office in a town or city. These offices would be responsible for managing the bookings and for procurement and strategic business decisions, while the camps and lodges are solely focused on providing a guest experience.

Studies on geographically dispersed teams have yielded many insights into the performance of these organisations (O'Leary & Mortensen, 2010). Increasingly, businesses and multi-national organizations are assembling teams of experts who work together and participate in projects while remaining physically dispersed in geographically distributed locations (Evaristo, Scudder, Desouza, & Sato, 2004). These dispersed organisations may reach global success, but the literature describes a number of challenges associated with operating in this context. For example, Zolin, Hinds, Fruchter, and Levitt (2004) suggest that when an organisation is geographically dispersed, workers often find it more difficult to share information, to observe others' work, and to develop rapport. Geographical distance brings with it differences in regional and national cultures, time zones, and work contexts, all of which may challenge the development of shared interpretations of operational uncertainty. Further challenges that commonly occur in geographically dispersed organisations are: reduced salience in communication; less sharing of knowledge; distrust of leadership; intra-group conflict; increased collaboration complexity; and fewer synchronous interactions (Cramton, 2001; Gluesing, 2003; Gössling, 2004; O'Leary & Cummings, 2007; Polzer, Crisp, Jarvenpaa, & Kim, 2006).

For organisational success in these dispersed contexts, the literature suggests that local knowledge, skills and resources need to be leveraged and across the organisation to enhance dispersed team understanding and responses (Sole & Edmondson, 2002). Furthermore, leadership is central to team identification, perceived trust, integrated organisational culture and commitment outcomes across distributed teams (Joshi, Lazarova, & Liao, 2009; Zolin et al., 2004). In the present study, the level of integrated awareness of how senior managers believe they will respond and how their colleagues will respond to the same risk situations was explored in three separate work domains, across three different geographical areas.

3.2 Risk and uncertainty

The term 'risk' in relation to organisations is defined as "the impact of uncertainty on organisational objectives" (ISO, 2009b). Elements of risk and uncertainty can be expected to derail or steer decisions and, ultimately, the performance of an organisation. The integration of risk management principles into organisational decision-making should be viewed as an essential enabler for achieving organisational objectives (ISO, 2009a). This study focuses on operational risk. The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS) defines operational risk as "the risk of loss resulting from inadequate or failed internal processes, people and systems or from external events" (BCBS, 2011). This definition, although specifically created in the financial sector, has been applied in other corporate environments. A slight adaption is proposed to define operational risk, for the purposes of the present study, as 'the uncertainty of loss associated with operational activities that could impact the organisation's objectives'.

VUCA (an acronym for 'volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous') has become common in describing the challenges facing organisations today (D'Souza & Renner, 2014, p. 83). In relation to organisational decision-making, uncertainty has been described as a key determinant in global decisions (Heide, 1994; Samaha, Beck, & Palmatier, 2014). Academics have described several types of uncertainty and how people may perceive and respond to these. For instance, Tetlock and Gardner (2015) refer to two types of uncertainty: epistemic and aleatory. Epistemic uncertainty refers to uncertainty that is unknown but possible, or a 'known unknown', whereas aleatory uncertainty refers to an uncertainty that is both not known and unknowable, or an 'unknown unknown', otherwise described as a 'black swan' event (Taleb, 2010). In the study reported here, the vignettes applied snapshots of four 'known unknown' operational scenarios relevant to the organisation. For example, one scenario intends to evoke an experience in camp where wildlife is free-roaming, as it is not uncommon for wildlife to be near to, or to move through camp. Wildlife guides are trained and have daily experiences of animal encounters, but other staff and guests are unlikely to have that level of experience and are therefore unlikely to react appropriately.

Cyert and March (1992) described uncertainty avoidance (UA) in their theory of organisational choice and control, suggesting that organisations seek to avoid uncertainty by following regular procedures and policies, rather than by attempting to predict future risk. Geert Hofstede borrowed the concept of UA from Cyert and March in the interpretation of the findings of an extensive national cultural survey at IBM in the 1960's. His UA factor consisted of three questions based on the correlations of answers between the items and the item content. The questions were: 'how often do you feel nervous or tense at work?', 'should company rules be broken?' and 'how long do you think you will continue working for IBM?'. These three questions assess job stress, rule orientation and career longevity. A weak UA score implies a high tolerance toward uncertainty while a strong UA score suggests that uncertainty is viewed as a constant threat. Hofstede found that the difference in mean answers by country for the three questions were correlated; in a country where people felt more stressed at work, for example, they wanted rules to be respected and a greater number of people wanted a long-term career. Hofstede states that the definition of uncertainty avoidance is "the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations" (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). This definition describes feelings towards uncertainty and does not describe how uncertainty is avoided in practice. Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 197) does later clarify that UA describes a way in which people or a group of people seek to reduce ambiguity. It is debatable whether the term UA is too focused or limited to the act of avoidance. Academics describe other similar constructs of uncertainty; uncertainty tolerance, ambiguity tolerance, uncertainty orientation and uncertainty acceptance (Grenier, Barrette, & Ladouceur, 2005; Hillen, Gutheil, Strout, Smets, & Han, 2017; Shane, 1995; Sorrentino, Holmes, Hanna, & Sharp, 1995). These overlapping constructs have been measured or conceptualised in

various disciplines with varying outcomes over the years. It was with this complex nature of uncertainty in mind, that this study applied an explorative approach which allowed for adequate flexibility during the interviews to investigate the construct.

Due to Hofstede (2001) and his colleagues' extensive research into organisational culture and application of the UA construct, the three questions pertaining to stress, rule orientation and career longevity were used as an entry point in the construction of the vignettes in this study. The vignettes were further bolstered by referencing existing literature on risk perception, psychological stressors and decision-making challenges which face geographically distributed teams. This approach provided for a novel platform to uncover new insights of the uncertainty construct in relation to a diverse group of managers in a geographically dispersed company.

3.3 Organisational risk culture and decision-making under uncertainty

Although organisational risk culture is not a key focus area of this study, it warrants brief consideration as it is a key determinant of organisational decision-making styles and processes (Dabić et al., 2015). Banks (2012, p. 82) suggests that risk culture is the 'fabric' that makes up effective risk management and states that risk culture is not an abstract concept without practical consequences. Schein (2010, p. 7) argues that we need to understand cultural forces because they explain many frustrating experiences in social and organisational life. Organisational culture can be defined as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organisation from others" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 6). In their study on organisational risk culture, Sheedy and Griffin (2017) found that senior managers tended to have a rosier perception of their organisation's risk culture than general staff. They also found that risk culture varied at business unit level within the firm and even at country level. Connors and Smith (2011) suggest that it is an organisational culture that determines a company's results, while the results that a company wants to achieve are determined by the kind of culture they need. On this basis, it is reasonable to assume that group cultures can both influence and be influenced by the decisions made in an organisation. At the Centre for Applied Risk Management (UARM) at the North-West University in South Africa, investigations into risk culture focus on the active integration of risk in decision-making as an indicator of the value afforded to risk in the organisation. This study applied the UARM definition of organisational risk culture: "The risk culture of an organizational group is manifested by the importance given to consideration of risk when the group makes decisions. The level of explicit inclusion of risk in decision-making represents the implicit, subjective value afforded to risk by the group" (Zaaiman, personal communication).

3.4 Risk perception and decision-making

Research on risk perception in organisations has been linked to the behaviours, cultures and actions of employees as well as stakeholders (Sjöberg, 2000; Slovic, 2000). According to

Bozeman and Kingsley (1998), if people believe that others take risks, especially senior and executive managers, risk-taking may be perceived as valid and less likely to meet with disapproval. The implementation and performance of risk management in large safari organisations is likely to be a complex challenge in that not only are their business operations separated geographically, but the perception of risk-taking propensity is likely to differ among groups. This spatial, social and psychological distance may well influence decision-making regarding risk and uncertainty (Liu & Onculer, 2017; Mukherjee, 2010; van Gelder, De Vries, & Van Der Pligt, 2009).

There are two dichotomous notions in the literature regarding perception of self in relation to risks. On the one hand, a constant theme in the literature is that increased proximity and frequency of exposure to a stimulus (either negative or positive) will result in familiarity and comfort in the individual's perception of that stimulus. This familiarity to exposure has been dubbed 'the mere exposure effect' (Janisse, 1970; Zajonc, 1968). An example of this theory in the context of the present study would be that if safari guides have been conducting walking safaris in big-game areas for a number of years, it is likely that they are comfortable and familiar with the risks associated with this job. It is unlikely that they will be fearful or avoid walking by themselves or with others in the bush. On the other hand, psychological research has also described the opposite effect. Perceived threats increase or may be perceived as being closer simply because people's attention becomes narrowly focused in high-stress situations (Cole, Balcetis, & Dunning, 2013; Stamps, 2012). While anxiety has also been found to alter the relationship between distance and perceived threat (Cole et al., 2013). For example, a guest from Europe is on a guided walk in the game reserve, when they see an elephant herd far in the distance. The guest has read of stories of elephant attacks in Africa, he feels under threat and his anxiety increases. He fails to hear the instructions and information provided by the experienced guide and runs off blindly into the bush. Perceived threats to oneself or others can also increase anxiety, and cause burn-out or other physiological responses associated with the 'fight or flight' reaction (APA, 2013; D'Souza & Renner, 2014; James, 2008; Lerner, Dahl, Hariri, & Taylor, 2007; Van der Kolk & McFarlane, 2012).

To explore decision-making responses toward operational risks across the work domains, the factor of risk perception was applied to both the participant and how that participant viewed the responses of his colleagues. The vignettes in the present study were accompanied by questions asking each participant to indicate how they perceived themselves reacting to the risk, and how they believed that others would respond to a similar risk. For example, "what would you do?" was followed by "what do you think other senior managers would do in a similar situation?" The cognitive process of imagining oneself in another's shoes is known as perspective-taking (Litchfield & Gentry, 2010). When the self-concept of team members in an organisation shifts from

the “I” to the “we,” they are more likely to act in ways that are normal for their shared group identity and thereby contribute to the team’s performance (Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004; Hinds & Mortensen, 2005).

3.5 The organisation studied here

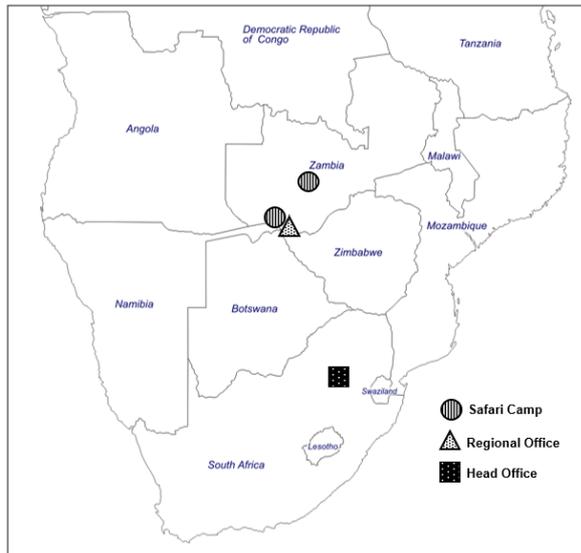


Figure 1: The selected geographic work domains in the organisation

The organisation selected for this study has been operating in the safari tourism industry for over 30 years. The company operates in several southern and east African countries, each of which has its own regional office that oversees the camp operations. These regional offices report to the central head office based in Johannesburg, South Africa. For this study, the head office, one regional office in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, and two camps in Zambia were selected, as demonstrated in Figure 1. All the camps are in remote wilderness locations; some are accessible only by light aircraft. The camps are not fenced and wildlife roams freely. Activities consist of game drives, boat/canoe rides, guided walks and scenic flights.

Each camp has a small management team, guides and general staff. The camp management reports to the in-country regional office and the regional office involves the head office when necessary. Senior and executive management staff travel to the regional office and camps from time to time. All strategic management, bookings, group policies and decisions are made at head office and filtered to the regions. The structure of the organisation is complex in that it needs to maintain a distinct identity and corporate values across geographically distributed teams, where each team has different roles, functions, societal and cultural backgrounds.

4 Method

An exploratory qualitative approach was applied using vignettes in face-to-face interview sessions with participants. In this study the interview data were qualitatively analysed using a phenomenological and inductive coding method, with the aim of uncovering themes related to decisions expected to be made in the face of operational uncertainties. Participants were asked to describe their own reactions as well as what they perceived the reactions of their colleagues would be in each scenario.

4.1 Participants and procedure

The participants in this study were 15 senior managers (11 males, 4 females) from the organisation described in the Background section, of an average age group ranging between 30 and 50 years old. The number of participants in each work domain was the same and they were selected by means of convenience sampling; camp (n = 5); regional office (n = 5) and head office (n = 5). Each participant was taken through an informed consent process and asked to consent to voice-recordings being made of their interviews (Appendix A). Four vignettes were developed for the study and all four were presented to each participant. The participants were first asked to imagine the scenario described and then to answer questions that related to the scenario.

4.2 Instrument

The vignettes were developed based on plausible operational risks that participants were likely to have experienced in the context of the organisation or the industry. According to Hughes and Huby (2012), vignettes are most effective when they are relevant to people's lives and appear real. Accordingly, the vignettes were designed to be personally relevant for the participants, and they varied in terms of the nature of the risk and the potential consequences of the scenario. The vignettes placed the participants in their own as well as in others' different work domains in the organisation. The aim of this approach was to gain insight into the perceptions at different vantage points in the organisation. For example: the participant is placed in camp for vignette 1, at a regional office in vignette 2, at the head office in vignette 3, and back in their own specific work domain in vignette 4. The questions merely tested the managers' perceptions; actual behaviour in the context of the vignettes was not observed.

The first three vignettes each contained a description of a personally relevant operational risk type situation about six to eight lines long (Appendix B). The vignette topics ranged from potentially encountering a dangerous animal while walking through the bush between living and work areas in camp (this vignette was loosely based on Hofstede's job stress question); to a colleague circumventing company rules and government regulations to fast-track a project (this vignette again loosely based on Hofstede's rule orientation question); to news circulating at the head office of an outbreak of an unknown illness in a nearby country (managing news of an outbreak). The fourth vignette contained a scenario in which a friend provides positive remarks about the diverse and unpredictable work life at the organisation, as well as perceived employee satisfaction (this vignette refers to Hofstede's employment stability or career longevity item). The 'wildlife in camp' scenario, for example, reads as follows:

Imagine the following: it's a lovely morning in camp and you are walking from the staff accommodation to the back office. Your colleague was going to walk with you but forgot something in her/his room and says she/he will catch up with you. It's only a five-minute walk

through the bush to the office. Out of the corner of your eye you spot a movement a few metres away from you in the bush; it looks like a swishing tail. You recall that the wildlife guides had mentioned that a pride of lions had been sighted around camp recently.

Seven question items followed each of the three vignettes, and in each vignette the individual was asked how she/he would react followed by how they perceived their colleagues would react. Although the three UA questions devised by Hofstede et al. (2010)'s were used to design the interview questions, additional questions were considered based on broader literature regarding risk perception and decision-making, such as Kahneman and Lovallo (1993) and Slovic (2000) . The specific uncertainty avoidance characteristics identified by Hofstede are associated with rule orientation, job stress, and career longevity, on the basis of which, therefore, the questions 'how do you feel about this situation?' and 'have you ever been exposed to similar situations before?' aimed at finding out participants' feelings associated with the risks, as well as psychological stressors such as anxiety.

Four items pertained to risk perception of self and of others, as well as rule-orientation, namely 'what would you do?', 'what wouldn't you do?', 'what would others in the organisation do if faced with a similar situation?', 'what would the organisation expect you to do?'. A fifth item, 'what could the organisation do to assist you in managing similar situations?' aimed to explore perceived 'tone from the top' aspects within the organisation. The final vignette used four questions to explore how the participants perceived the unpredictable nature of day-to-day work in the organisation and perceived longevity of a career in the industry, both for themselves and for others. The interviews were semi-structured, leaving the opportunity for open-ended exploration of answers and allowing the researcher to prompt participants for more information where possible. The interviews lasted about half an hour each.

4.3 Analysis

The interview data were transcribed, and a thematic coding process was followed. Interesting statements, phrases and words were then highlighted in different colours (green for reactions; orange for feelings and yellow for quotations or scenarios of interest). Responses to each question in each vignette were collated and organised in a spreadsheet for comparative purposes, and specific code categories and codes were subjectively identified, circled and recorded in the spreadsheet. The codes were considered in terms of whether they could potentially contribute to, or reference, elements of reactions or approaches to uncertainty. The initial code list amounted to 148 codes. To narrow and organise these codes for further investigation, a frequency of mention (FOM) process was applied. The frequency of codes was calculated and totalled across the three work domains. These codes were further whittled down by combining or linking codes that were synonymous in the context, e.g. role, position and level. Codes found to have little or

no bearing on uncertainty were discarded. Ultimately only the top 8 codes were selected for the discussion of results (refer to Appendix C for the full list of items).

4.4 Practical considerations

Owing to the geographically dispersed nature of the organisation, the following considerations were made when conducting the research.

- Scheduling travel: Flight and staff availability to the camps had to be considered and meetings arranged in advance, prior to departure, in conjunction with the organisation's reservations department as well as the regional head office. Camps and regional offices were selected based on their availability at the time of conducting the research.
- Travel time: As many of the camps were located in remote areas, travel took up significant time, limiting the actual time available for conducting the vignette-based interviews. For instance, to get to one of the camps in Zambia involved an international flight, followed by two local charter flights, an hour's *mokoro* (local canoe) ride and a 30-minute game drive.
- Vocabulary: Not all participants were first-language English speakers and although all senior managers conversed well in English, the flexibility of the interviews allowed for clarification when required.
- Using a voice recorder: As the study was qualitative and the vignettes encouraged open-ended answers, the information was most conveniently captured by voice recording. When interviews were completed, they were transcribed without disruption or hindrance. Voice recording reduces potential interviewer error caused by note-taking that presents information incorrectly or that skips words to keep up with the respondent's answers (Barriball & While, 1994).

4.5 Limitations

This research was limited by the following factors.

- Time limitation: Only about four months were allocated to designing the vignettes, conducting the interviews and transcribing the data.
- Participant demographics: This study used a sample group of only senior managers in only three out of the seven countries in which the organisation operates. Although the sample consisted of persons from a variety of backgrounds, societal, ethnic and national cultures were not considered for this study.
- Number of participants: Owing to the time limitations and the qualitative method used, the participant sample was small ($n = 15$), which provided narrow but deep insight into a segment of the organisation.

- Single case study: Although the organisation selected for this study is large in the safari industry, the results were limited to a subset in one organisation in one industry. To investigate and confirm these results, further research will need to be conducted.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Confidentiality was assured to all participants as well as the organisation, and maintained throughout the research process. The name of the organisation was also withheld as requested by the organisation. Permission to conduct the study was granted in writing by the organisation's Commercial Director. Due process was followed to adhere to the North-West University's ethical requirements, and ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant committee. Permission to voice-record the interviews was requested and granted by each participant.

5 Results and discussion

The following results were gleaned from the transcribed and coded interview data. Discussions are presented with reference to each specific vignette and linked to the coded data as well as to the initial research questions. A preliminary model is presented from the accumulated research data.

5.1 Coding results

The following themes and codes were extracted from the interview data. Table 1 summarises the key codes identified from the master code book (refer to Appendix C). These codes serve as the basis for discussion of the results of the study.

Table 1: Summary of all codes, descriptions, frequency of mention and examples.

Code	Description	Frequency of mention	Example
Situational context	The operational context in which the risk is found such as the physical environment or situational context	278	"It's difficult, I mean it depends what the situation is"; "Different countries require different sets of reactions. So, what works in Botswana might not work in Namibia"
Personal context	The individual's life context, such as the stage in the individual's life ambitions or life goals	102	"I know there's a time that I want to be with my family and that will be possibly what will make me leave the remote area – to be with my family"
Experience related	The level of individual experience or exposure to certain risks or situations	153	"Guides are obviously very aware of their surroundings because it's in their nature and it's their job"; "I think it's exposure, the lifestyle that they've had living in a more remote area or the big horrible city"
Information related	The type of information received, assimilated, assessed and communicated	189	"...get the facts right. To understand exactly what's going on"; "communicate and make sure that what the company policy decision or statement is...and we have to make sure the responses are uniform. Like from the top it should translate downward and it should be the same [across group]"
Role related	The position or role within the organisation and the level of autonomous decision-making that this role grants the individual	89	"Ya, I think my role is quite clear"; "[I would do] nothing, it's not really in my role. It's an advisory role, I don't have an active role in that, I suspect"
Emotional response	The subjective, often uncontrollable emotional factors, such as anxiety, stress or fear, which are enabled by uncertainty	139	"There is always fear. Fear of the unknown"; "...sometimes it's the instinct hey, it just kicks in and the adrenaline, you are not guaranteed but you might do the right thing!"
Cognitive response	Heuristics or bias that influences decision-making whether consciously or unconsciously	72	"It's probably critical thinking that's the key thing and analysing the ability to sum up the situation very quickly and then decide what the right action is"; "Have common-sense to deal with it [the situation] logically"
Behavioural response	The physical response or behaviour towards a specific stimulus or situation	45	"I would go straight to the manager"; "My first reaction would be that I want to run, because fright and flight takes place"

5.2 Vignette 1: Results and discussion

The following vignette was described to participants in order to explore their reactions and responses to a potential encounter with a dangerous wild animal in the camp environment. As wild animals tend to be unpredictable, this scenario targets the uncertainty of being personally exposed to an imminently life-threatening situation. The vignette was worded as follows:

'Imagine the following: It's a lovely morning in camp and you are walking from the staff accommodation to the back-office. Your colleague was going to walk with you but forgot something in her/his room and says she/he will catch up with you. It's only a five-minute walk

through the bush to the office. Out of the corner of your eye you spot a movement a few meters away from you in the bush; it looked like a swishing tail. You recall that the wildlife guides had mentioned that a pride of lions had been sighted around camp recently.'

Table 2 summarises the 15 participants interview responses to the questions following vignette 1, assessed in relation to the data codes and this study's research questions. To explore the understanding of how other senior managers in the organisation will react to a similar situation, the difference in perceived responses is also shown.

Table 2: Vignette 1; comparison of number of responses to participants' perceived reactions and the expected reactions of other senior managers across the work domains.

	How did senior managers perceive their own reactions to the potential animal encounter?		How did they think other senior managers would perceive and respond to the same situation?		Difference in understanding
Code	No.	Description (self)	No.	Description (other)	Difference of Self vs Other (% difference)
Situational	13	Know the environment well	9	Know the environment well	4 (31%)
Personal	0	No mention	0	No mention	0 (0%)
Experience	10	Can relate situation to past experience/ exposure	7	Can relate situation to past experience/exposure	3 (30%)
Information	6	Will visibly confirm the threat	3	Will visibly confirm the threat	3 (50%)
Role	5	Are confident in their ability to respond	4	Will be confident in their ability to respond	1 (20%)
Emotional	13	Fearful or nervous	7	Fearful or panic	6 (46%)
Cognitive	7	Will apply cautious thinking	3	Will apply cautious thinking	4 (57%)
Behaviour	10	Will not run	5	Will not run	5 (50%)

The findings for vignette 1, represented in Table 2, indicate that the majority of senior managers across the work domains are familiar with the potential risk of encountering wildlife in camp, many stating that they can relate to similar experiences when visiting or working in the camp environment and admit that they would be fearful or nervous. There was more than a 50% difference in how the individual participants believed they would personally react compared to how they perceived their colleagues would assess and respond to the situation. A participant from the camp remarked that in his experience *"no matter how much we advise people to hold their ground in such situations. Not everyone manages to do that.... they [other staff] are not experienced, they are not trained, they are not exposed to animals like that."* O'Leary and Cummings (2007) state that "the more isolated geographically dispersed teams are from each other, the more their awareness of the other will decrease".

Figure 2 highlights the four key differentiating codes between how the participants perceived their response and how they thought other senior managers across the organisation would react to potentially encountering wildlife in camp.

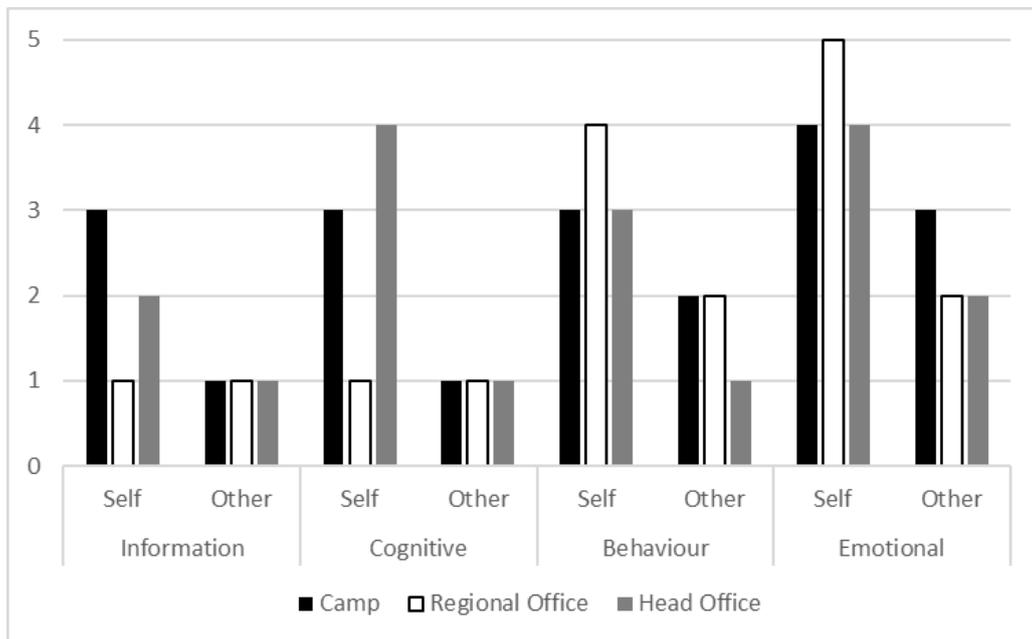


Figure 2: Vignette 1; how participants believed they would react to the situation (self) in their work domain compared to how they expected other senior managers from across the organisation (other) to react to the same situation.

These findings suggest that the individual participants would want to assess and confirm the threat before deciding how to react (information and cognitive); that they perceived their physical response, in not running away, to be appropriate and certain (behaviour); and admitted that the scenario would evoke fear and concern (emotional). As pointed out in Table 2, there is a visible difference between the individual participant and what they would expect from the other team members. Mainly from an emotional and behavioural perspective; the managers found the way that other staff would respond to be unpredictable. Most responses involved *“I think they would do the same as me”*, *“I think it depends on the person”* or that instinct would be the key driving response and therefore unpredictable, whereas they appeared confident about their own reaction to the situation even when they confirmed that the scenario would evoke fear and concern. D’Souza and Renner (2014) suggest that uncertainty about one’s own competence is often a driver of workplace anxiety and that people often report feelings of conflict between their inner experience of “not knowing” and the pressure to maintain the outward appearance of competence.

According to (Messner, 2016) uncertainty is a subjective experience and feeling, that is acquired and learned. Experience grows confidence and competence in navigating risks. For someone who is a seasoned traveller they are likely to know which places to visit, what to avoid, what to pack in a first aid kit etc. Whereas someone who has never left their home country and embarks on a trip overseas, they have no experience and no reference beside that which TV, the internet

or friends have told them. With limited to no experience in travel, uncertainty is likely at its peak (this is of course part of the adventure and appeal of travel). Even if the traveller is confident and perhaps ignorant, there is great uncertainty in how he will respond when faced with a risk or threat during his trip. One participant from the head office highlighted this risk brought on by ignorance and lack of experience: *'I think the biggest risk is when you don't know what you are going to do, because you have never been in that situation. And that's why guides walk guests to their rooms, because they [guides] know what their default reaction is going to be because they have been in it. So, it's not an unknown'*. Slovic (2000) suggests that although critical thinking is important in many decision-making circumstances, "reliance on emotion is a quicker, easier and more efficient way to navigate in a complex, uncertain and sometimes dangerous world".

5.3 Vignette 2: Results and discussion

As with any organisation, human dynamics and interactions play a vital role in organisational decision-making activities. Efficient interaction may be derailed when individuals are confronted with ethical dilemmas such as bending the rules to achieve a desired outcome. The following results refer to specific responses to questions posed in the second vignette which was worded as follows:

'Imagine the following: You are at the regional office for a meeting regarding a new project proposal. It seems evident to you that there is still a lot of administrative and contractual matters that need to be resolved before the complex project would be able to commence. The manager leading the proposal seems very optimistic that it would commence in less than one month. After the meeting, a colleague remarks to you that the manager had circumvented company policy and government regulations to fast-track the project. She/he asks you to keep this information confidential.'

Table 3 summarises the 15 participants interview responses to the questions following vignette 2, assessed in relation to the data codes and this study's research questions. To explore the understanding of how other senior managers in the organisation will react to a similar situation, the difference in perceived responses is also shown. The findings from vignette 2 suggest that most of the participants had been exposed to a similar situation while working in the safari tourism industry. A head office participant remarked that when these situations arise, people accept and operate in a way that gets them results, which is not necessarily expected of a corporate business. The participant goes on to state that *"it comes from the place of wanting to get things done...and it's a habit that comes from that culture of being a family business, of having strong relationships... of trusting people. And so, it's that versus due diligence and best-practice in a listed business"*.

Table 3: Vignette 2; comparison of number of responses to participants' perceived reactions and the expected reactions of other senior managers across the work domains.

	How did senior managers perceive their own responses to this ethical dilemma?		How did they think other senior managers would perceive and respond to the same situation?		Difference in understanding
Code	No.	Description	No.	Description	Difference of Self vs Other (% difference)
Situational	9	Feels that the industry fosters these situations	3	Feels that the industry fosters these situations	6 (67%)
Personal	2	Feel it's a personal risk	4	Feel it's a personal risk	-2 (50%)
Experience	12	Can relate to past experience/ exposure	4	Can relate to past experience/ exposure	8 (67%)
Information	5	Will do a fact check	4	Would do a fact check	1 (20%)
Role	8	Able to address the issue	6	Would be able to raise the issue	2 (25%)
Emotional	12	Would be uncomfortable/ concerned	7	Would feel uncomfortable/ concerned	5 (42%)
Cognitive	9	Would be objective	8	Would be able to be objective	1 (11%)
Behaviour	9	Will speak up and follow protocol	6	Would speak up and follow protocol	3 (33%)

A majority of the participants stated that this situation would make them feel uncomfortable, yet they were largely confident in their role in the organisation that they would be able to raise their concerns to appropriate individuals. Interestingly, there were not many responses prioritising information with only a few participants indicating that they would want to get the facts of the situation before raising the issue. There was little difference in how participants understood how they would interpret this situation compared to how their colleagues would think about this situation, believing that most team members would be objective. Although the total responses regarding what they would physically do was not large, only a few of the participants expressed confidence what they believed other senior managers would do. One head office participant remarked *“sho! [it is] very very difficult to speak for other managers”, but I would hope...that they would have the same sentiment as me”*.

Figure 3 highlights the four key differentiating codes between how the participants perceived their own reactions and how they thought that other senior managers across the organisation would react toward rules being broken.

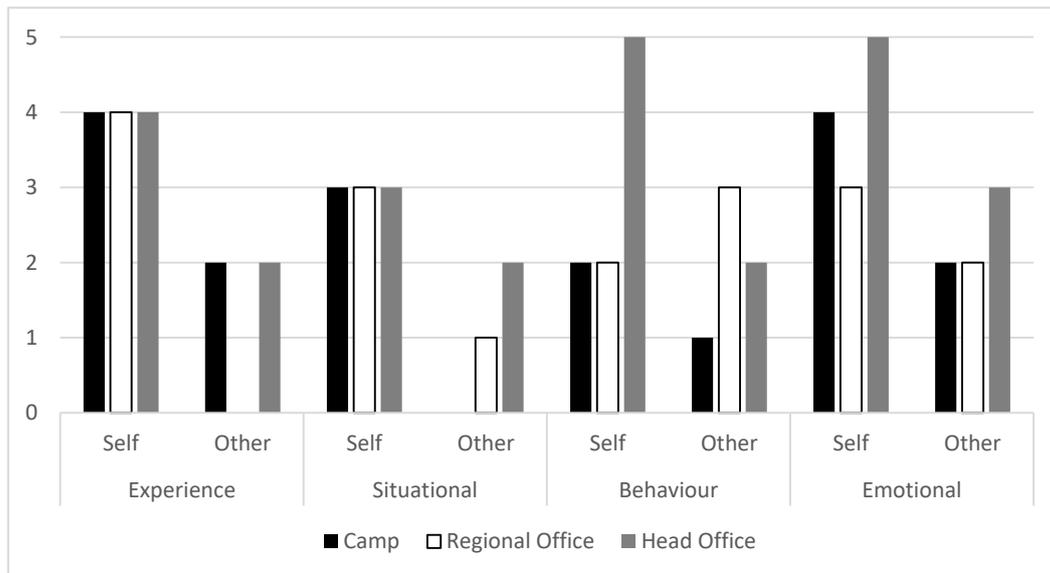


Figure 3: Vignette 2; how participants believed they would react to the situation (self) in their work domain compared to how they expected other senior managers from across the organisation (other) to react to the same situation.

Although most participants stated that they had been in similar situations they were not certain of the level of exposure that other senior managers had had (experience). The strong perception was that the industry or geographic context fosters this behaviour (situational); for example, some participants stated that the political context, such as that prevailing in Zimbabwe, where corruption is rife, forces all businesses to step outside the lines from time to time, and one head office participant described the lack of following formal procedures at times as cause for some concern: “...the safari industry is very cowboyish, they do things by the shake of hand; it's not a bad thing, it just needs to be balanced”; that they will respond as the organisation expects them to, by following established processes (behaviour) and that the situation would evoke discomfort and concern (emotional). The participants were far more confident in how they would respond compared to how they perceived their colleagues across the organisation would respond. According to Litchfield and Gentry (2010) differences between individuals’ perspectives may be even larger when they experience systematically different environments.

As this is a situation that sits firmly in the realm of right or wrong, participants found it difficult to speak for others. One participant from the regional office was reluctant to form an opinion: “that would be quite judgemental!” Notably, the head office managers believed that they would not tolerate this kind of situation and would raise the issue, whereas managers in the other domains were more hesitant in raising the issue and felt they would rather wait for someone else to deal with it. A head office participant remarked on the different ambiances in the different domains in the organisation: “I feel like it's a more sophisticated [business] environment (head office) ...versus the operational (regional) offices, which is more people with experience...I think that it's very much seen as two opposite cultures. So, the view is that if I adopt this one, I lose the other one. If I adopt the corporate culture, I lose the warmth and the informality and the essence. When

in reality it's not like that at all, it doesn't need to be like that. It's realising one is a business requirement and the other is a culture."

5.4 Vignette 3: Results and discussion

As the result of an Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, bookings were reported to have fallen by as much as 50% for safari operators in Africa, despite most of them being located in East and southern Africa, where the risk of exposure was significantly low (Beekwilder, 2014). The following results indicate and elaborate on the responses to questions posed in the third vignette, which was worded as follows:

"Imagine the following: You are working at the head office/have gone to the head office for a meeting, when you receive a company circular in your inbox. The news states that there has been an outbreak of an unknown illness in Zambia. International agents have been raising concerns of an outbreak of Ebola or the Zika virus, and are questioning whether they should cancel their guests' holidays to Africa."

Table 4 summarises the 15 participants interview responses to the questions following vignette 3, assessed in relation to the data codes and this study's research questions. To explore the understanding of how other senior managers in the organisation will react to a similar situation, the difference in perceived responses is also shown.

Table 4: Vignette 3; comparison of number of responses to participants' perceived reactions and the expected reactions of other senior managers across the work domains.

	How did senior managers perceive their own responses to this uncertainty?		How did they think other senior managers would perceive and respond to the same situation?		Difference in understanding
Code	No.	Description	No.	Description	Difference of Self vs Other (% difference)
Situational	10	Isolated to geographic areas	6	Isolated to geographic areas	4 (40%)
Personal	2	Family being affected; potential loss of job	3	Family being affected; potential loss of job	-1 (33%)
Experience	12	Can relate to past experience/exposure	7	Can relate to past experience/exposure	5 (42%)
Information	9	Seek official information	2	Seek official information	7 (78%)
Role	10	Feel responsible for managing this situation	3	Would feel responsible for managing this situation	7 (70%)
Emotional	10	Would be upset or anxious	7	Would be upset or anxious	3 (30%)
Cognitive	6	Assess level of information	5	Assess level of information	1 (17%)
Behaviour	12	Talk to guests, staff, family	7	Talk to guests, staff, family	5 (42%)

The findings from vignette 3 show that many of the participants believed that these scenarios were isolated to specific geographic areas such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia, and that, in environments such as Namibia or Botswana, staff were unlikely to experience these threats. Participants based at the head office described more strategic and cognitive responses, whereas emotional responses were greater from participants based at the camp in Zambia. Research has found that perceived proximity and subjective interpretation of distance have distinct effects on the organisational and team dynamics, above and beyond the effects generated by physical spatial distance (O'Leary & Mortensen, 2010; Wilson, O'Leary, Metiu, & Jett, 2008). As many as 12 (80%) participants had experienced or been exposed to similar situations before, citing the repercussions from the Ebola outbreak in west Africa in 2014, even though they were all physically removed from the threat. More personal experiences were related to regional and camp staff having contracted or been close to malaria, cholera or yellow fever outbreaks. More than 50% of the participants thought that this news would be upsetting, referencing the hardships that the Ebola crisis had placed on the industry in the past; one manager from the regional office said it would feel *"like all the air coming out of a balloon"*. A news report in The Economist highlighted the Ebola crisis as 'the ignorance epidemic' and commented that tour operators across Africa reported that the results of this ignorance by international tourists, caused the biggest drop in tourism business in living memory on the continent, stating a fall of up to 70% in bookings in that year (Economist, 2014). Because of the past financial losses and threat to business associated with the Ebola crisis, many of the regional and head-office participants indicated that they would take a cautious approach by investigating the facts, and be certain of the situation before deciding on a response. The majority of participants suggested that their actions would include effective and fast communication to guests, agents and their colleagues during this time, to mitigate the spread of false information and ignorant actions such as cancellation of bookings when there is no actual threat.

Figure 4 highlights the four key differentiating codes between how the participant perceived their responses (self) and those of other senior managers (other) across the organisation. Most of the participants stated that they had been exposed to similar situations before (not necessarily to Ebola, but citing malaria, cholera and yellow fever, for example), but they were not certain of the level of exposure that other senior managers had had (experience). Senior managers across the organisation who had been in the industry and the organisation for more than five years, appeared well seasoned with these threats and uncertainties. A participant from the head office with more than five years in the organisation commented that handling this kind of experience was not unprecedented: *"There is experience in managing the business through these periods, definitely"*. Camp managers felt that obtaining the appropriate level of information was their greatest priority in understanding the potential danger, mainly so that they could alert their families and ensure their own well-being. While the regional and head office managers were more concerned about

disseminating accurate information to their agents and guests to alleviate any misplaced anxiety and mitigate any cancellations. Head office participants recognised that the camp would be the most affected work domain, as *“it’s a more personal fear because it’s closer [to them]”*.

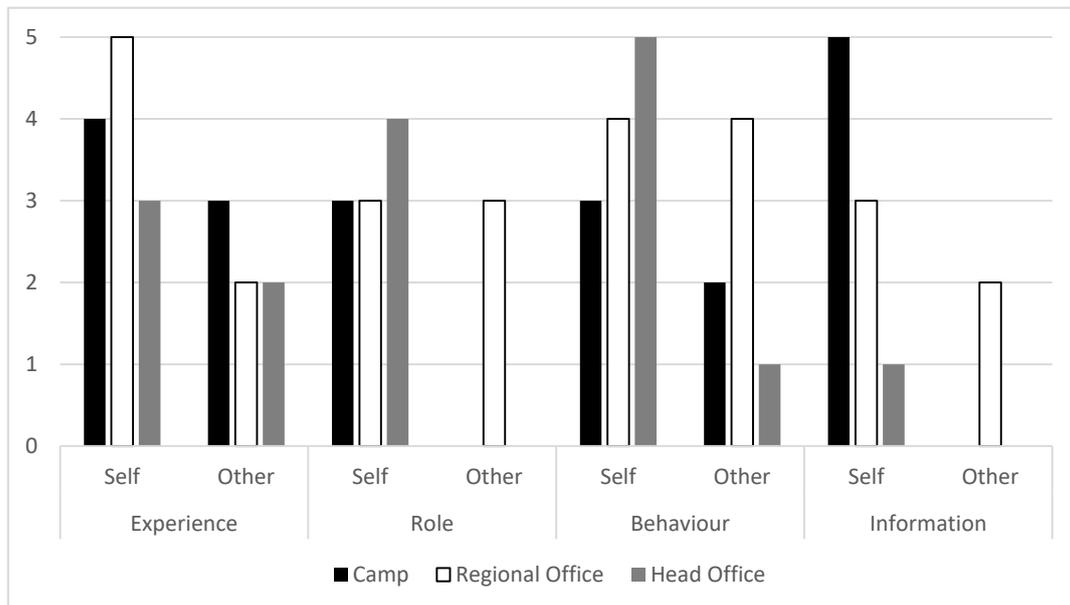


Figure 4: Vignette 3; how participants believed they would respond to the situation (self) in their own work domain compared to how they expected other senior managers across the organisation (other) to respond to the same situation.

There was a marked role-based confidence in that all senior managers felt that they would be a necessary point of communication for both internal and external purposes. However, they showed less confidence in how other senior managers across the organisation would respond in their roles. A head office manager remarked that his greatest concern was that other staff would start communicating the situation via social media and not follow protocol. It’s possible this type of scenario highlights areas of potential trust concerns, which is one of the challenges that geographically dispersed organisations face. Sole and Edmondson (2002) state that key to effective decision-making is the ability to draw on the skills and resources within the organisation.

How other managers would act and behave to this scenario was less certain. A head office participant felt able only to speculate: *“It’s difficult because we don’t really know the people. I would guess that they would stay calm”*, while a camp manager expected managers from other domains not to cope well, remarking, *“I think they will panic; think of closing the camp and going home to reduce risk”*. Despite this uncertainty, there appeared to be a consistent confidence at the head office level at that level that the organisation would cope well, because of successful handling of previous event of this kind and because of the prevailing team spirit: *“As a company, we have shown incredible resilience in weathering these storms”* and *“[our company] is people, it’s not a company with its own identity or personality. It’s all of us”* (head office participant). Such responses illustrate Hofstede’s comment that *“culture is to a human collectively what a personality is to an individual”* (Hofstede, 2009, p. 10).

5.5 Vignette 4: Results and discussion

What affects peoples' career longevity today is probably very different to when Geert Hofstede applied his IBM survey in the 1960's. However, in principle, low tolerance of uncertainty in a workplace that has a high degree of unpredictability is likely to influence how long staff members are willing to stay. The following results show how senior managers perceive their current career and future in the industry. Vignette 4 proposed the following scenario:

“Imagine the following: A friend has come to visit you at work. He tells you that he thinks your work environment is so unique and how lucky he thinks you are. You discuss the wildlife areas, the travel, the activities and the types of guests that visit the various regions. He remarks how refreshing it must be not really knowing what each day will bring in such a diverse organisation.”

Table 5 summarises the 15 participants interview responses to the questions following vignette 4, assessed in relation to the data codes and this study's research questions.

Table 5: Vignette 4; comparison of number of responses to participants' perceived reactions and the expected reactions of other senior managers across the work domains.

	How did senior managers perceive their career longevity in the industry?		How did they think other senior managers would perceive and respond to the same questions?		Difference in understanding
Code	No.	Description	No.	Description	Difference of Self vs Other (% difference)
Situational	6	It depends what work domain you stay in	8	It depends what work domain you stay in	-2 (25%)
Personal	12	Want a long-term career in the industry	4	Want a long-term career in the industry	8 (67%)
Experience	8	More than 5 years in the industry	8	More than 5 years in the industry	0 (0%)
Information	3	Require motivational input from employer to stay	7	Require motivational input from employer to stay	-4 (57%)
Role	7	Is satisfied in the existing role/ position	9	Are satisfied in their existing role/ position	-2 (22%)
Emotional	12	Pride or satisfaction	7	Pride or satisfaction	5 (42%)
Cognitive	4	Peer influences lead to change in jobs	7	Peer influences lead to change in jobs	-3 (42%)
Behaviour	7	Seek change	8	Seek change	-1 (13%)

To explore the understanding of how other senior managers in the organisation will react to a similar situation, the difference in perceived responses is also shown. Unlike the previous three vignettes, the results from vignette 4 indicated a high personal and emotional responses to the questions. Namely, participants indicated that they would want a long-term career in the organisation or industry, and that they had considerable pride or satisfaction for working for the organisation. There appeared to be a strong understanding between the groups within the

situational context, their experience in the industry and their behaviour. In all domains of work the participants were empathetic to the familial needs and ambitions that their colleagues would likely have. The role-based responses varied, for instance camp managers remarked on the uncertainties associated with camp life from weather changes to a delayed supply delivery, which would require quick problem solving and amendments to the daily schedule. Whereas a financial manager at head-office is likely to have a very set routine day to day and would seek their job satisfaction in other ways. A participant from head office, who works in financial management, commented that: *“My role can be quite repetitive. Change alleviates the boredom, but change isn’t a function purely of our operation, it’s the function of being a business that’s changing”*.

Figure 5 highlights the four key differentiating codes between how the participant perceived their own reactions (self) and those of other senior managers (other) across the organisation.

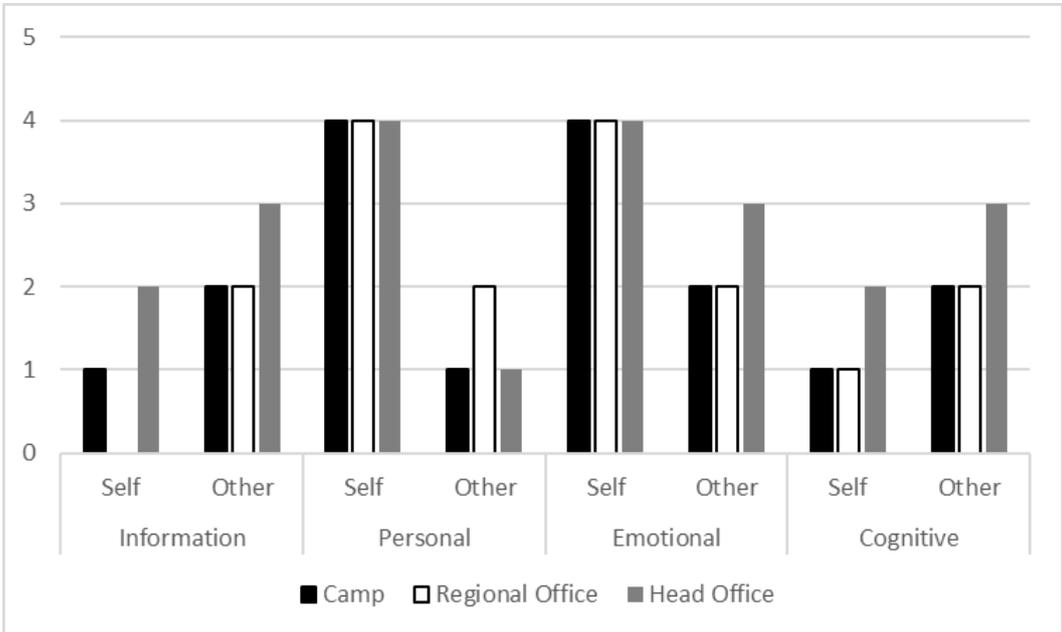


Figure 5: Vignette 4; how participants perceive other senior managers (other) feel about a long-term career in the industry in relation to themselves (self).

The participants seemed to think that they personally would not require as much motivation as other managers in the organisation to stay in their position or in the industry, and indicated that they were more satisfied in their role and within the organisation for the long term than other managers in the organisation. One head office participant pointed to the collegial atmosphere as a motivation to remain in the job: *“it is the culture of the management set up and team that I would stay with as opposed to wanting to stay in the tourism industry.”* In all areas of the organisation, participants agreed that a career change would depend on their personal lives and ambitions, and on decisions such as whether they would want to start a family in a specific area or whether they would wish to become a department head. The camp participants were most likely to follow their peers in a decision to change to another operator and requested stronger motivation from the organisation to retain their services. On this point, a camp participant commented that camp staff

observed others senior managers elsewhere in the organisation as being better off, saying that they *“feel the people that are working out there are way better than them that are here in camp”* and a regional head office participant indicated that as new safari operators open up in the area, it is possible that staff would follow each other to alternative opportunities. According to Kern, Friedman, Martin, Reynolds, and Luong (2009), aside from the objective providing income, careers and career longevity relate to social roles, self-concept, ambition, and well-being.

5.6 A preliminary model: how operational risks are perceived in the context of the individual decision-maker and factors that may influence their resulting actions

According to Park (1999) “our perception of risk normally differs from the reality of risk because we receive, filter and distort information”. The preliminary model presented in Figure 6 derives from the results of the present study. The model suggests a process flow from the point when a person is confronted by an operational risk, to the way in which the information is assessed and influenced and the way in which it could result in a behavioural response and decision-making in response to the perceived risk.

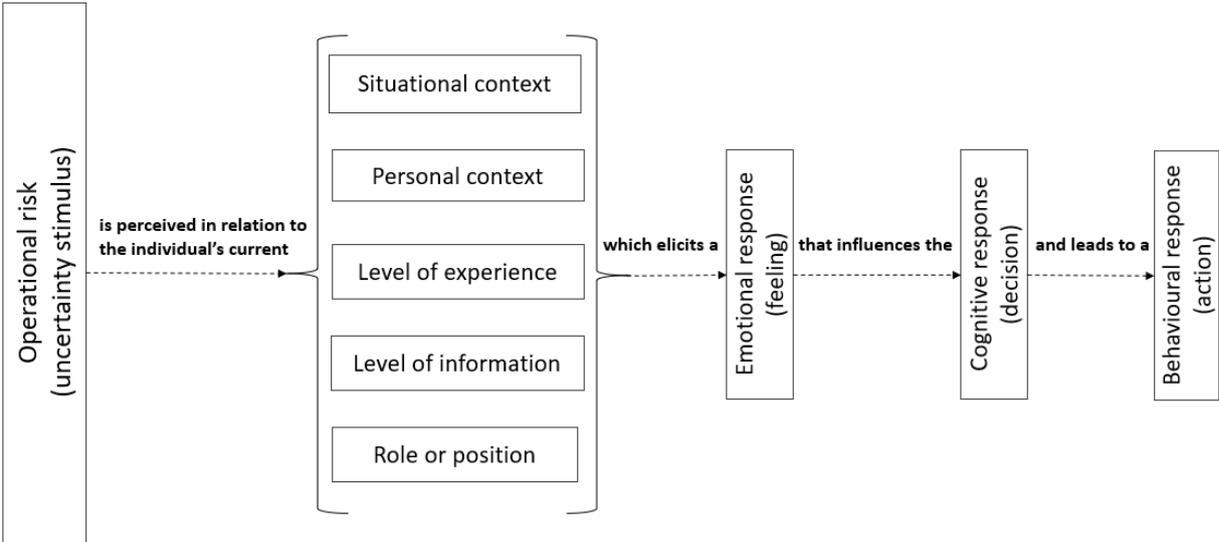


Figure 6: A preliminary model representing the process of individual risk decision-making and response in the face of an operational risk related uncertainty.

The data gathered in this study, on which the model is based, suggests that when an uncertainty is confronted, the final decision is likely to be influenced by a number of contexts applicable to each individual. Even when individuals perceived their responses to be based to some extent on certainty, they struggled to perceive clearly how other individuals would respond to the same risk. In their integrated model of uncertainty tolerance, Hillen et al. (2017) suggests that an ambiguous stimulus would be perceived and then appraised cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally. And that our perceptions to uncertainty could be moderated by individual, cultural and situational factors. A key differentiator between Hillen et al. (2017) and this study’s preliminary model is the inclusion of accessible information, level of experience and the role of individuals in the organisation. These contexts are specifically relevant to distributed teams. Knoblen and

Oerlemans (2006) suggest that geographically distributed organisations can enhance inter-organisation collaboration by closing the perceived proximity gap and substituting face-to-face contacts with regular communication via communication technologies. Peters, Burraston, and Mertz (2004) propose that people appear to base their judgements of an activity not only on what they think about it but also how they feel about it, and that emotion can evoke a physiological reaction that affects how we think and behave. How our resulting behaviour, and how we and others physically respond to the risk, are influenced by all the above contexts. The more we experience, feel and learn, the more quickly we can adjust our behaviour over time. Cole et al. (2013) argue that perceptions of the environment and the action responses within it are not independent, but are “dynamically interwoven psychological processes”. Therefore, there is likely to be an iterative internal process guiding emotional and cognitive processes involved in decision-making before final action is taken. As one participant from head office remarked: *“It’s like you learn how to behave and it’s in degrees.”* How behaviour can be assimilated across an organisational team that operates across geographic locations is a continuing challenge requiring dynamic and continuous focus by the organisation.

6 Conclusion

Perceived behaviours and decision-making relating to operational uncertainties appeared to be influenced by key elements such as situational context, operational experience, role level, and communication. For example, participants tended to feel anxious or uncomfortable if they found themselves in a situation in which inadequate information was communicated or if they had limited experience or exposure to the risk.

Hofstede and his colleagues pioneered research into organisational culture, and the uncertainty avoidance components were a valuable starting point on which to base this study’s vignettes. From the rich interview data gathered during this study, key insights were achieved, not just in how people felt about uncertainty, but what they perceived their decisions and actions (and the decisions and actions of others) would be. These additional insights are potentially a useful avenue for broader research and testing of approaches to uncertainty in relation to organisational decision-making. This study’s findings indicate that individual responses to uncertainty appear to be largely contextual, influenced by key elements including past experiences and exposure, and communication that influences behaviour and decision-making. The results illustrate the principle outlined by Rasmussen and Suedung (2000) that risk management can be discussed in greater depth when the decision-making involved in the normal day to day involvement with operational risk is considered carefully. The findings further support the conceptual model proposed by Hillen et al. (2017), while contributing additional insights and considerations specific to geographically distributed organisations and teams.

Although the other cultures that the study participants belonged to was not explored in depth here, future studies could include considerations such as tribal culture, family culture, national culture and diasporic influences. Combinations of different cultures add to the challenges of conducting business across borders (Brewer & Sherriff, 2007). This study's preliminary model may offer further research opportunities into organisational risk culture.

Uncertainty is a shared human experience. An approach to uncertainty, and whether uncertainty is tolerated or accepted, is likely to be largely contextual and influenced by every unique situation. Decisions may appear obvious and then be over-ridden by emotions or bias, causing human error. Mishaps start at an individual level and translate at an organisational level, so the question is how can organisations navigate such challenges? The preliminary model deriving from this study's data offers a base-line for a more in-depth study to test the reliability and validity of uncertainty constructs related to decision-making and resulting actions. The application of the model could contribute to research into any multi-national organisation, not just safari tourism, including mines and industrial sites, for example. With technological advancements, geographically dispersed organisations are growing rapidly. The issue of decision-making in the face of operational uncertainty is likely to continue to challenge such organisations, and it is within this context that they rise to the challenge to stare down their lion or to run.

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REFLECTION

The topic of uncertainty is a broad and abstract concept. The concept is fundamental to risk, risk management and human behaviour, a combination of topics which intrigues me. By focusing on uncertainty avoidance, I thought I would be able to narrow the study of such a wide knowledge area, but that didn't prove to be the case. I was initially very anchored on Hofstede's approach and his application of UA in his research. Many other organisations and researchers have applied this concept to other academic domains and I too initially used Hofstede's three UA components to draft my vignettes.

It was only later in the research process that I uncovered criticism and alternative applications of uncertainty to that of *Hofstede et al.* This led to an 'ah-ha' moment and allowed me to re-adjust my article title, from purely focusing on UA, I was able to look at the subject of uncertainty in a broader sense. This was in fact a relief at the time as by then I had accumulated much interview data that I could not easily link only to Hofstede's UA items. Instead I discovered that perceptions towards uncertainty are complicated by unique contexts, environment, experiences, communication and roles. Even though this is specific to the remote context I studied, I believe it's likely to be relevant elsewhere. I have considerable respect for Hofstede's work. However, I feel his existing components for UA are too limiting to gain any reliable understanding of individual or societal responses to uncertainty. I do feel the vignettes successfully captured real-life scenarios faced with uncertainty. From the results gained in this study I would re-assess the criteria in future on which to observe and measure approaches to uncertainty, and not be as restricted by one approach as I was here.

I do think how organisations approach uncertainty, how they tolerate it or accept it, cultivates the overall organisational culture. It's debatable whether approaches to uncertainty should be a separate assessment for organisations or included in a risk culture assessment in the future. Either way the concept should be given its due, it's multi-faceted and important in understanding both individual and organisational decision-making.

The results of the study were not at all as I expected at the departure point in my study. A week before handing the final article in, I stumbled across a conceptual model which very closely resembled mine. The model was proposed in a medical journal in 2017 and it is fascinating how convergent processes occur! This is not a bad thing and instead it has provided an opportunity for future integrated risk and uncertainty related research. Studying geographically distributed organisations, is something that continues to intrigue and excite me. The context is so unique and diverse, especially in Africa. Although perhaps the world is so global and diasporic now that this is the reality everywhere.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of introduction and consent for participants

Dear participant

You are invited to participate in an exploratory study which investigates employee perceptions and response to operational risks to which you are exposed to daily. The information below is provided for you to decide whether you are willing to participate in the study. We will appreciate your participation as your insight and experience will provide us with valuable information for future contribution to the subject of risk management. The study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the North-West University.

Title of the study

Staring down the lion: uncertainty avoidance and operational risk culture in a tourism organisation

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Purpose of the research

The purpose of this study is to investigate how uncertainty affects risk decision-making in an organisation. Even if a scenario is not familiar to you, we are interested in your experience, what you think, do or feel, your opinions or perceptions regarding this subject.

The research questions

The interview consists of four open-ended questions and should take about 30 minutes of your time.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from this study at any time.

Voice recording

To ensure that the interview data and the transcriptions are as accurate as possible, the researcher requests that the participant consents to having the interview voice recorded. Voice recordings will be saved anonymously. Should you choose not to consent to this, please draw a line through this paragraph and sign next to it.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is guaranteed. No personal information collected in this study will be disclosed. The researcher will mainly use aggregated data in the research study report. Your name and the name of your organisation will not be associated with the published research findings.

Risks

There are no risks associated with the participation in this study.

Queries about the research

Should you have any questions about the research study, kindly contact the researcher or her supervisors.

Agreement and signatures of the Participant and the Researcher

Appendix B: Vignettes

Vignette	Questions	Factors	Reference/Source	Link to Research Objective (1-3) *
<p>Wildlife in camp <i>Imagine the following:</i> It's a lovely morning in camp and you are walking from the staff accommodation to the back-office. Your colleague was going to walk with you but forgot something in her room, and says she'll catch up with you. It's only a 5-minute walk through the bush. Out of the corner of your eye you spot a movement about 5 meters away from you, it looked like a swishing tail. You recall that the guides had mentioned that a pride of lions had been sighted around camp recently.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you feel about this situation? What will you do? What won't you do? What would others in the organisation do if faced with the same situation? What would the organisation expect you to do? What could the organisation do to assist you in managing similar situations? How often have you been exposed to similar situations like this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence/absence of psychological stress Risk perception (inwards & other) Biases (e.g. confidence, proximity bias etc) Rule orientation (tolerant vs avoidant) Perceived proximity & frequency of exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DSM-5 Based on Hofstede's 1st & 2nd UA question (stress & rule orientation) Slovic (perceived risk) Houghton et al (bias effect on team risk perception & decision making) 	1-3
<p>Office matters <i>Imagine the following:</i> You are at the regional office for a meeting regarding a new project proposal. It is evident that there is still a lot of administrative and contractual matters that need to be resolved before the complex project would be able to commence. The manager leading the proposal seems very optimistic that it would commence in less than 1 month. After the meeting a colleague remarks to you that the manager had circumvented company policy and government regulations to fast-track the project. She asks you to keep this information confidential.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you feel about this situation? What will you do? What won't you do? What would others in the organisation do if faced with the same situation? What would the organisation expect you to do? What could the organisation do to assist you in managing this situation? How often have you been exposed to similar situations like this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence/absence of psychological stress Risk perception (inwards & other) Biases (e.g. confidence bias) Rule orientation (tolerant vs avoidant) Perceived proximity & frequency of exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DSM-5 Based on Hofstede's 1st & 2nd UA question (stress & rule orientation) Slovic (perceived risk) Houghton et al (bias effect on team risk perception & decision making) 	1-3
<p>Outbreak <i>Imagine the following:</i> You are working at the head office, when you receive a company circular in your inbox. The news states that there has been an out-break of an unknown illness in Zambia. International agents have been raising concerns of an outbreak of Ebola or the Zika virus, and questioning whether they should cancel their guests' holidays to Africa.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you feel about this situation? What will you do? What won't you do? What would you expect the other managers in camp/regional offices will do? What would the organisation expect you to do? How could the organisation assist you in managing this situation? How often have you been exposed to similar situations like this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence/absence of psychological stress Risk perception (inwards & other) Biases (e.g. confidence bias) Rule orientation (tolerant vs avoidant) Perceived proximity & frequency of exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DSM-5 Based on Hofstede's 1st UA question (stress) Slovic (perceived risk & benefit) Houghton et al (bias effect on team risk perception & decision making) 	1-3
<p>Operational diversity <i>Imagine the following:</i> A friend has come to visit you at work. He tells you that he thinks your work environment is so unique and how lucky he thinks you are. You discuss the wildlife areas, the travel, the activities and the types of guests that visit the various regions. He remarks how refreshing it must be not really knowing what each day will bring in such a diverse organisation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you feel about his remarks? Do you think other people in the organisation would feel the same? How many years do you expect to remain in this industry? How do you think other's in the organisation feel about a career in this industry? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Known unknowns (tolerance vs avoidant) Longevity Perceived awareness of others in geographically dispersed work domains Perceived proximity & frequency of exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D' Souza & Renner's 'Not Knowing' Based on Hofstede's 3 UA question: longevity of career (although in this case not specific to org but rather industry) Zolija et al (geographically dispersed decision making) 	1-3

Appendix C: Master code book; all items

Item	HQ	Regional	Camp	Total
Emotional Response				139
Anger	1	0	0	1
Anxiety	2	1	0	3
Dissapointment	2	0	0	2
Courage	0	0	2	2
Fearful	4	1	6	11
Nervous	4	2	2	8
Panic	6	6	3	15
Passion	7	0	1	8
Stress/Stressful	3	1	0	4
Tense	1	0	3	4
Terrified	1	0	0	1
Worried	1	0	0	1
Scared	10	5	17	32
Adrenaline	1	2	0	3
Encouraged	2	1	3	6
Exploited	1	0	0	1
Comfortable	6	2	0	8
Uncomfortable	3	0	3	6
Safe	11	2	10	23
Averse	1	0	0	1
Behavioural Response				45
Attitude	1	0	0	1
Assumption	1	0	0	1
Analyse	1	0	0	1
Accept	2	0	0	2
Instinct	0	1	0	1
Buy-in	4	0	0	4
Complacent	1	0	0	1
Confidence	5	0	1	6
Conflicting	1	0	0	1
Consult	0	2	0	2
Control	1	1	1	3
Diligence	4	0	0	4
Ego	1	0	0	1
Pro-active	3	0	0	3
Malicious	2	0	0	2
Reactive	4	0	0	4
Resistance	2	0	0	2
Avoid	0	0	1	1
Tolerate	1	0	0	1
Transparent	1	1	0	2
Trust	1	0	0	1
Immobilised	1	0	0	1
Role Related				89
Role	7	1	1	9
Level	43	6	3	52
Position	16	0	0	16
Obligation	3	0	0	3
Valued	6	1	0	7
Restrictive	2	0	0	2

Items	HQ	Regional	Camp	Total
Experience Level				153
Experience	31	24	28	83
Encounters	0	1	1	2
Logic	4	0	0	4
Resilience	3	0	0	3
Exposure	8	3	6	17
Fail	0	1	2	3
Fair	2	0	0	2
Familiar	0	0	2	2
Fault	3	0	0	3
Expert	2	0	0	2
Mistake	1	0	0	1
Skills	1	0	0	1
Sophisticated	1	0	0	1
Variation	1	0	0	1
Rigid	1	0	0	1
Training	9	6	12	27
Cognitive				72
Unconscious bla	11	0	0	11
Sensible	4	0	0	4
Sensitise	0	0	4	4
Perception	4	0	0	4
Perspective	13	3	0	16
Opinion	2	0	0	2
Ignorance	1	0	2	3
Common-sense	3	1	0	4
Awareness	14	8	2	24
Information				189
Ethos	1	1	0	2
Goal	4	1	0	5
Values	2	0	0	2
Policy	4	2	0	6
Informality	1	0	0	1
Process/cedure	11	1	7	19
Practices	5	0	3	8
Motivational	0	0	4	4
Accurate	3	0	0	3
Information	17	16	21	54
Communicated	11	10	11	32
Secret	1	2	1	4
Facts	3	6	2	11
Investigate	1	2	4	7
Education	0	2	1	3
Proof	1	0	0	1
Understanding	2	6	7	15
Known	2	6	3	11
Unknown	1	0	0	1

Items	HQ	Regional	Camp	Total
Personal Context				102
Diversity	10	0	0	10
Community	1	1	0	2
Beliefs	0	0	2	2
Loyalty	1	0	0	1
Life/livelihood	4	0	0	4
Personality	4	2	1	7
Relationships	5	3	7	15
Family	2	6	15	23
Principles	1	0	0	1
Reputation	3	1	9	13
Culture	19	1	4	24
Operational Context				278
Dangerous	2	2	6	10
Environment	15	8	4	27
Risk	19	2	16	37
Reality	11	6	1	18
Fickle	1	0	0	1
Geography	0	2	0	2
Growth	1	0	0	1
Flexible	3	0	0	3
Habit	1	0	0	1
Isolated	3	0	1	4
Loss	0	0	2	2
Nature	3	2	0	5
Remote	5	0	1	6
Monotony	0	2	0	2
Repetitive	3	0	0	3
Benefits	2	0	1	3
Surroundings	0	4	0	4
Unique	3	2	0	5
Certain	0	0	1	1
Challenge	1	8	0	9
Chance	3	0	0	3
Change	12	4	0	16
Situation	16	19	28	63
Pressured	5	0	0	5
Bad	3	1	4	8
Unexpected	0	0	2	2
Volatility	2	0	0	2
Opportunity	9	1	2	12
Ethical	2	2	0	4
Survival	1	0	0	1
Threatening	0	2	0	2
Caution	4	0	0	4
Incident	2	1	0	3
Assess	2	1	1	4
Valuable	1	0	1	2
Potential	1	0	0	1
Spectrum	2	0	0	2