

SSIRC 2021-131

## STARING DOWN THE LION: UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE AND OPERATIONAL RISK CULTURE IN A TOURISM ORGANISATION

**Malora Keevey\***

UARM, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa  
ORCID: 0000-0002-0712-5418

**Fred Goede**

UARM, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa  
ORCID: 0000-0002-4556-2563

### **Abstract:**

The academic literature is not clear about how uncertainty influences operational risk decision-making. This study, therefore, investigated 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 uncertainty. Convenience sampling was used to identify 15 managers across three African countries in three domains of work: safari camp; regional office; and head office. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in which vignettes were incorporated, to which participants responded with their own reactions and decisions to the situations described, as well as with ways they thought other managers would react to these specific operational contexts. The data were transcribed and qualitatively analysed through thematic coding processes. The findings indicated that approaches to uncertainty were influenced by factors including situational context, the availability and communication of information, the level of operational experience, and participants' roles. Contextual factors alongside diverse individual emotional and cognitive influences were shown to require prudent consideration by safari tourism operators in understanding employee behavioural reactions to uncertain situations. A preliminary model drawn from the findings suggests that, in practice, decision-making in the face of uncertainty is more complex than existing theoretical studies propose. Specifically, the diverse responses anticipated by staff in response to the vignettes could guide safari tourism management towards better handling of risk under uncertainty in remote locations.

### **Keywords:**

Uncertainty, operational risk, geographically dispersed decision-making, safari tourism, risk culture